

Federal bureaucrats. It still sends government money to political campaigns—government money, taxpayers' money, to political campaigns, for goodness' sake. It still puts Washington in the middle of the States' redistricting decisions and on and on. The same rotten core is all still there.

The Senate knows how to make a law in a productive, bipartisan way. We have done it this year on multiple subjects. We have done it on election issues themselves in recent memory—the Help America Vote Act 20 years ago that Chris Dodd and I put together. We did that when there was an actual problem that needed solving and an actual bipartisan process. But as long as Senate Democrats remain fixated on their radical agenda, this body will continue to do the job the Framers assigned it and stop terrible ideas in their tracks.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Catherine Elizabeth Lhamon, of California, to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Department of Education.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I know we are going to be voting soon, but I wanted to comment. I hope that Democrats and Republicans can rise above party to come together to protect our precious right to vote. I know, in Vermont, we do that. We make it very clear that voting is a right. Everybody can vote. We try to make it as clear and open as possible. People can be in jail for a crime; they still have a right to vote. We do not take it from anybody. You can vote right until the last minute. You can get absentee ballots. As a result, we have an overwhelming vote in Vermont—one of the highest percentages in the country.

Some suggest, well, you do it to favor one party or the other. I just point to the last election. The Governor and

Lieutenant Governor are elected separately in our State. We elected a Republican as Governor and a Democrat as Lieutenant Governor. It went back and forth like that all the way across the ballot.

It is just an example that we just want people to vote. And the timing right now couldn't be more urgent. In the wake of the Supreme Court's Shelby and Brnovich decisions, dozens of States are trying to restrict access to the ballot for tens of thousands of Americans, even millions of Americans—minority voters, the elderly, rural voters, student voters, the disabled, and others. These are the people we protect in my State.

The threats to the voting rights of any American are threats to all Americans. Indeed, they are threats to America, itself.

I am glad the Senate has taken much-needed action this week on the Freedom to Vote Act. It is a vital piece of legislation. It establishes common-sense rules of the road for voting procedures and ensures equal access to the ballot box for all Americans.

This bill is a compromise version of the original S. 1, and I note it reflects good faith efforts to broaden support for the legislation here in the Senate. I look forward to supporting this legislation on the floor. I can only hope it doesn't fall prey to the knee-jerk partisanship we have seen all too often lately in the Senate.

I am also proud to have recently introduced the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. That is a bill I have long championed and sponsored. This legislation would restore the core pillars of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that have been gutted by the Supreme Court's damaging and strange Shelby and Brnovich decisions.

But it also would provide critical protections to Native American communities across the country, including Alaska Native communities. This bill would fundamentally restore the Justice Department's powers to oversee and prevent harmful discriminatory changes to voting laws and procedures.

How can anybody stand up and say, "I am a proud American, but I am going to let some of these legislative bodies do things that will stop other Americans from voting"?

If you are a proud American and really mean it, then you want every single American—I don't care what their political party is, they should be able to vote.

I am working extremely hard to build bipartisan support for this bill, which—especially the past few Congresses—has been overwhelmingly bipartisan. I am optimistic we can arrive at a good bipartisan compromise that can serve as a starting point for continued bipartisan discussions here in the Senate.

You wouldn't know it if you listened to the partisan sound bites and Twitter wars in the modern media era, but this goal—protecting our right to vote—was never a partisan issue.

Our hero, a man I loved and was proud to serve with, John Lewis, once said:

We all know this is not a Democratic or Republican issue. It is an American one.

Well, truer words haven't been spoken. John Lewis was absolutely right. This is an American issue. If you believe in democracy, you believe in the right for everybody to vote. For those of us who run for elected office, I have always fought in Vermont to make sure everybody could vote, knowing that there were some sections of the State where there may be a majority voting against me. I have always insisted everybody be able to vote. That is democracy.

The core provisions of the act have been reauthorized five times—five times. Every single time it was with overwhelmingly bipartisan support in Congress. Republicans and Democrats alike voted for it. President Nixon, President Reagan, President George W. Bush proudly signed Voting Rights Act reauthorizations into law. Those Presidents—Presidents Nixon, Reagan, George W. Bush—spoke of the profound importance of the landmark law for our democracy.

In fact, just to show how it goes, the most recent Voting Rights Act reauthorization in 2006—you know what the vote was in the U.S. Senate: 98 to 0.

Some people feel we couldn't get a vote like that to say the sun rises in the East. But the fact is, every Republican, every Democrat said we need this to make sure Americans vote. It is not a case of saying Democrats vote or Republicans vote or Independents vote; it is Americans vote and we want all Americans to.

You know, the toxic partisanship of American politics today has sadly obscured what has united us across party lines for so long. The belief that protecting our right to vote—the very right that gives democracy its name—that is bigger than party or politics. It is the belief that a system of self-government—a government of, by, and for the people—is one that is worth preserving not only today, but for generations to come. It is the belief the government exists to serve the will of the people, not the other way around.

If I can just wear my hat as dean of the Senate—one who has been privileged to serve here all these years—I ask Senators, let's get back to doing things the way we have always done them: reaching across the aisle in good faith, meeting each other in the middle, legislate to protect the rights of the American people.

Even after all these years, I still have faith the Senate can serve as the conscience of the Nation. I believe it can shine a light on the path forward even on the most difficult, seemingly insurmountable issues. I believe we can do that again now on the fundamental issue of voting rights. So let's get to work. Our democracy—indeed our country as we know it—may very well depend upon it.